243 As the rice plants burst into fruit, sparrows (pipit) and rats (chit) especially are attracted to the milky, immature grain, and every effort is made to drive the predators away. The most common attempts consist of hanging bits of mirrors, tins with sticks attached as clappers, and lengths of bamboo with hardwood clappers, all with heavy strings tied and leading to the open porch of the langkau so that the guardians can set the mirrors aflashing and the clappers astriking to frighten away the sparrows, rats and other animals.

Despite all of the magic on which the Ibans call, their supplications to pests and predators alike in Ngemali Unai, and the employing of sprays, traps, sounds and lights, an amount of each year's crop is lost to insects, birds and animals. Freeman's word of warning, that

> "among themselves the Iban are greatly given to hyperbole, so that the complaint: "Ambis padi aku laban babi' ('All of my padi has been destroyed by pigs'), means that a patch a few square yards in area has been trodden down."

Ganai Apai Gaun, who alleged that he had lost half of his rice crop to sparrows and rats, has had a sufficient crop every year for the [731] past five years. Following the unseasonable floods in August, 1971, he complained that all of his shoots rotted under the standing water, and while he lost some plants, his crop this years promises to do well. Despite these losses, he had to buy rice for only two months before harvest.

243 154 The reasons for exaggeration due to losses from pests and predators are numerous. It permits inefficient farmers to save face. It prevents

243 disappointment if the harvest does not come up to expectation. It
154 protects the remainder of the crop from the dangers of reprisal from offended spirits, or from compliments from a person who can put a curse or hex on a crop, causing it to wither and die simply by commenting,
[657] "Uh, you have a good crop this year, eh?". A new reason for hyperbolical statements of losses has been provided by the Welfare Department which began making grants of rice to longhouses in which people had run out before the harvest. If officials in that Department were convinced that members of a community were in need, a grant was made; hence, the need to be convincing and exaggerative.[14]

243 Lest the wrong impression be conveyed, in sixty-four per cent of
433 the cases in the concentrated study, it was necessary to buy rice or to exchange labor or goods for it within the longhouse. But, in no single case could the cause be laid to pests alone.

[221] The period from late January to early March is known as bulan mrya gantong sendok ("the months when the ladle hangs (empty)"), and supplies of rice in a majority of cases run out. The Ibans then must buy
000 from their fellows who have surpluses, or from Chinese traders. At Rumah Gaong, members of twenty families provided labor for Enchul Apai Jimmy

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[14] The attitude expressed by some Ibans, but by no means all, has been, "If someone else is getting rice, I'm going to get some as well, for I pay taxes, too."